

MINGLING OF PEOPLE, CULTURE AND RELIGION IN

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE'S *WHITE MUGHALS*

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ABSTRACT

William Dalrymple is not working with a gripping tale of the British-Indian politics before the onset of colonialism, but he is also giving evidence on the cultural exchanges between the White people and the Indians (especially with the Mughal-Muslims) in the Pre-Victorian era. White Mughals is not only ambitious in scope, but also rich in detail, in terms of demonstrating the last part of the Seventeenth century and the early half of the Eighteenth century British India, and the first White Westerner arrives to India and appreciates, adjusts, adapts, and gets seduced by the Mughal and Indian culture.

KEYWORDS: Colonialism, Intermingling of Culture and Religion, Relationship

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INTRODUCTION

White Mughals is a complete love story that describes the love story of an English man and a respectable Muslim lady who belongs to a noble Muslim family. *White Mughals* shows the British's first contact with the Islamic lifestyles and also a British Lieutenant James Achilles Kirkpatrick's romantic relationship with a Hyderabad noble woman Khair-un-Nissa Begum. Dalrymple balances the plethora of facts, by unearthing libraries and museums, and bringing out history and religious-cultural crossroads between the Europeans and the Indian society (mainly the Muslim Nizams) that few really existed. Kirkpatrick changes his religion just for the sake of his love, besides that this book best describes the political, cultural and religious issues of India. The very title of the book (*White Mughals*) specifies its subject. The beautifully written story that surpasses the cultural, religious and political boundaries throws insightful light at the very cultural, religious and political aspects of India during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. This document aims to explore the mingling of both the Indo-Islamic and the British cultures, ideas and religious views as portrayed in the conceptualized text.

William Dalrymple gives the traditional introduction about India of his time, though the main focus of the book is Kirkpatrick's story. In the start, Kirkpatrick's brother James is a passionate and hardworking individual who in 1797 became the acting resident of India. Kirkpatrick and Khair-un-Nissa share a much unexpected love story, the main reason is obviously the religion as Khair-un-Nissa belongs to a typical Muslim family and they have the tradition of marrying within the limits of the same caste and same tribe. Another reason is being an Englishman it is impossible for Kirkpatrick to marry a local girl like Khair-un-Nissa.

Dalrymple shows in this historical travel narrative as to how, many of the British are fascinated by the Islamic religion, custom, and culture. At the outset, the first British residents took up the Muslims lifestyles in

India, and other regions like North Africa, the Middle East, etc. (Godiwala), and a British Lieutenant James Achilles Kirkpatrick who first came into contact with the Islamic lifestyles are much taken by it leading to a romantic relationship with a Hyderabad noble woman Khair-un-Nissa Begum.

The fact that Kirkpatrick is a British Resident army in the court of Hyderabad, and Khair un-Nissa is the niece of the Prime Minister of Hyderabad makes the crossover of the cultural element more captivating (McRoy, 2003). Studying the Kirkpatrick's family itself shows the family's hybrid life and their non-conditioned ethnic, national, cultural, and religious borders that the society is made to accept. Unlike other people, Kirkpatrick is shown as being conditioned to marry into Islam culture, gives his work profile. *The New Yorker* describes this book as:

After five years' work with a trove of documents in several languages, Dalrymple has emerged not only with a gripping tale of politics and power but also with evidence of the surprising extent of cultural exchange in pre-Victorian India, before the arrogance of empire set in.

Intermingling of Culture

The novel is an intricate work of non-fiction taking up the highlights from the social history and reporting the warm relations between the British and a part of Indian society at that time. The book is a mixture of all the cultural impact (Hindu, Mughal and British) that is already well-known in the Mughals's history, where Muslims and Hindus existed together. It highlights the inter-racial/ethnic relationships that existed between the white officers and Indian women together with documenting the geo-political context of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century of subcontinent. It shows an intricate mixture of cultures as the novel quotes "'the unexpected and unplanned mingling of peoples and cultures and ideas". (Dalrymple, 2005 p 4)

The title of the book, *White Mughals*, specifies its subject. He uses the phrase 'White Mughals' to point out the Englishmen who adopted characteristics of Mughal life and values. The duration between the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth century was very lucky for India, when surprisingly people merge their ideas and values.

White Mughals shows the English notable in the East India Company, the locals of Hyderabad, Captain James Achilles Kirkpatrick changes his religion to Islam just to marry Khair-un-Nisa who is a noble Muslim lady of Hyderabad Mughal family. Being the English local of Hyderabad Kirkpatrick has to balance the obligations of his boss the East India Company, with his comforting point of view towards the system of Hyderabad. (Dalrymple, 2005). The British exercises of getting the Indian wives and sustaining the trend of female servants provides something that refreshes the difference of bare racial separation of the Victorian in Nineteenth century. (Dalrymple, 2005).

Dalrymple throws a perspective that all the female relatives of Khair-un-Nisa respect her love story and her marriage with Kirkpatrick. However, their greed of getting affiliated with "White-power" made them to support their love story. While to some extent this could be true, it certainly does not give a definite analysis towards the marriage culture in subcontinent.

Changing the religion is not less than an abuse for Kirkpatrick. But on the other side the readers are unaware of the Khair-un-Nisa's thoughts being used as a puppet in the royal conspiracy or how her life changed, how hard her life became. Not only Khair-un-Nisa, but Kirkpatrick also have to face so many problems. His British peers are not ready to accept his change. According to Dalrymple, it is not the right time for going domestic. This change in culture has given very tough time to Indian as well as Britain's. Many people become the victims of this change. Those people are unable to

celebrate their personal dreams though they have well celebrated the success of the royal and anti-royal families. The conversion to Islam by Kirkpatrick was one of the best things that happened to India in late Eighteenth century.

Intermingling of Religion

Amidst the cultural merger of Britain and India, religious merger is gaining more tolerance. It is very common for an Englishman to marry a native girl and embracing Islam or Hinduism is no more a strange thing. This novel also shows the Dalrymple's concerns about religion. Dalrymple belongs to a Catholic Christian family. Dalrymple believes that Christianity and Islam have an old relationship. Kirkpatrick is shown to possess different persona as compared to other British leaders. He is a kind and respected man. He respects the other religions, and their differences.

Knowing the fact British are in power, unlike the other luxurious leaders of British he has never tried to change their practices, he is shown to never impose his religious views on Indians and gave freedom to his people to exercise their religion. Through this book British leaders are shown to be religious-unbiased and tolerant. Kirkpatrick has not only changed his religion and marry Khair-un-Nisa but he also raised his voice against the unfair practices of other leaders. He has also followed the dressing and ways of living of Mughal Emperor. He has changed his religion to Islam and at the same time he has started working against the East India Company.

There are other European officials like William Linnaeus Gardner, has converted to Islam like Kirkpatrick, and finds flavour of life by converting to Islam. Gardner is shown as being commanding cavalries together with Stuart, thereby making the East India Company military establishments being commanded by two converts (Roychoudhury, 2004). There is also a fascinating George Thomas (an Irishman), who is enthralled by the Indian culture and that of the Musalman in particular that he lets go of his culture and religion by taking a Persian name, forgets how to speak English, and obtains a kingdom for himself in Haryana. Many of the rich commoners are also enthused by the Musalman culture that they even go to the extent of maintaining harem and keeping women with purdah. In this context, it can be stated that for men, the Islam religious-cultural element of harem is seen as appealing and the most easily adapted and popular feature among the western people (McRoy, 2003). Along with liking the women, the Europeans are also inclined towards the Indian food – curry –, and even Indian dress.

Other Europeans like 'Hindoo Stuart' is shown as being enthralled by Hinduism and not Islam. He is commanding the largest cavalry cantonment in central India at that time. He has converted in to Hinduism, and pride himself in not drinking alcohol, not eating beef, and performing regular Pooja (Roychoudhury, 2004). Stuart is often referred to as 'General Pundit' or 'Pundit Stuart'. He engages in visiting the 'Chukla Ghat' where the Hindus bath, especially the women, and even speaks of building a pagoda (temple) near this place. He is also shown as saluting every Hindu with 'Jey Sitaramjee' (Dalrymple 2004 p34). Stuart is thus not simply an admirer of the Indian religion, but he is also a deep devotee of Hinduism. He is seen as being culturally mesmerized by the Indian culture like the way Hindu women dressed, their beauty, and their behaviour, and reportedly urges European women to imitate the Indian women culture. Such passion for Hinduism and its culture of Stuart was nothing so unusual during that time, since there are Europeans who show penchant for this religion and culture. For instance, other Europeans like James Grant is shown as giving bell to a Durga temple in Benares, since a Hindu Pandit prays for his family after being caught in a whirlpool in the Ganges. Other incident like the British celebrating the 'Treaty of Amiens' inside the Temple of Kali has also been referred to by Dalrymple.

This historically contextualized text imbued in novel are describing and analysing multi-racial, multi-cultural, and multi-religious nature of the Europeans (in particular British) in the Seventeenth century and early half of the Eighteenth century which makes Dalrymple's writing unique in its own contribution.

CONCLUSIONS

White Mughals is an inclusive book that shows Dalrymple's efforts that he has put on writing this book. Quoting broadly makes the book amazing. *White Mughals* is an impenetrable and well-researched book, unlike fictions there is nothing imaginary though the writer knows how to keep the reader interested. The story does not end with the death of Kirkpatrick; Dalrymple continues the story to know what had happened with Khair-un-Nisa and their children after Kirkpatrick death. The book also provides the interesting picture of India in the agony of change, and reaction of people towards change.

To sum up the facts and fiction, religion and culture crossover, and relationship between India and Britain in Dalrymple's own words, "the story of a family where three generations drifted between Christianity and Islam and back again, between suits and salwars, Mughal Hyderabad and Victorian London, seemed to me to raise huge questions: about Britishness and the nature of Empire, about faith, and about personal identity; indeed, about how far all of these mattered, and were fixed and immutable - or how far they were in fact flexible, tractable, and negotiable" [Dalrymple 2004 p31]

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